

## Modenese Apennine

### RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR ARCHITECTURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

#### PHOTO REFERENCES:

PHOTO N. 5 "INTERIOR OF THE PIEVE OF ROCCA S.MARIA"  
PHOTO N. 7 "PIEVE OF RENNO"  
PHOTO N. 12 "ABBEY CHURCH OF FRASSINORO"  
PHOTO N. 23 "ORATORY OF S.ROCCO IN FIUMALBO"  
PHOTO N. 3 "MONTESE FORTRESS"  
PHOTO N. 6 "MONTECUCCOLO CASTLE"  
PHOTO N. 10 "RUINS OF GOMBOLA CASTLE"  
PHOTO N. 18 "SESTOLA CASTLE"

### **Modena, the city of the Romanesque**

When people refer to Modena as the city of the Romanesque, they are normally thinking of the Cathedral built by Lanfranco and Wiligelmo. Given the historic and artistic importance of this building and its creators, they are certainly justified, but this view is really an over-simplification when we consider the number of Medieval churches and abbeys dotted all over the Province of Modena. There is heated debate about the problem of restoring these buildings, as some people consider that any restoration work, however well done, is still an imitation, while others maintain that painstakingly correct repairs can ensure that important buildings survive the ravages of time.

### **Romanesque architecture in the mountains**

The Romanesque churches which have survived in the Modena Apennines do not have their own strong architectural personality but spring from the coming together of local experience and the highly skilled Lombard masters. Visiting them is rather like a treasure hunt, since they are often well off any modern beaten track, and in some cases it takes a trained eye to appreciate the authentically Romanesque features which have survived later reworkings.

#### Pieve di Renno

This, the mother church to over 30 others during the XV Century, stands a few kilometres from the via Giardini between Pavullo and Lama Macogno. It is of extremely ancient origin, dated to the IX Century, and is rough but impressive and austere in appearance. The very compact, undecorated facade now includes the main door and three large windows opened in 1722. Inside, two wheel-shaped monograms of Christ are sculpted on one of the octagonal pillars.

#### Pieve di Rocca S. Maria

Also a short distance from the via Giardini, this time below Serramazzone, this ancient church (VIII-IX Century) has also undergone considerable restoration on its facade and in the upper part; the tower has been completely rebuilt. The interior is unusual, divided into a central nave and two side aisles resting on short, sturdy columns topped by capitals with floral decorations that are certainly the church's most interesting, authentic features; the stylised leaves are interwoven with plaits, coils and six-pointed stars with constant inventiveness.

#### Abbey church of Frassinoro

Founded in 1071 by Beatrice of Lorraine, Marquess of Tuscany, the Abbey stood on a very important route from the Po Valley to Tuscany. In the XV Century a landslide ruined the abbey and the adjoining Benedictine monastery, which was not rebuilt. Today's church is the result of rebuilding work, with a few traces of the richness of the original building in the form of a pink marble column or a white marble sculpted capital amongst the grey of the sandstone. Lions and griffins from the Medieval bestiaries appear in some capitals and in a bas relief on an inside wall.

Further Romanesque churches

Church of S. Maria Assunta, Denzano (Marano sul Panaro)

Pieve di Trebbio

Church of S. Vincenzo, Monte Obizzo (Pavullo)

Pieve di Rubbiano

Church of Monte S. Giulia, Monchio

Church of S. Michele, Fiumalbo

Oratory of S. Biagio, Roncoscaglia

Church of S. Giovanni, Vesale (Sestola)

### **Castles in the Mountains**

There are many castles, built as solid fortresses in dominant positions, in the Modena Apennines, and there would be even more of them if we were also to consider smaller defensive structures such as towers and "tower-houses", which reflect a history of local struggles and continuous unrest. We will limit our survey to the most important, best preserved castles. That of Guiglia, in a defensive position overlooking the Panaro valley, is now a hotel. Montefestino castle in the Frignano region is private property, so only the outside can be seen, but the battlements protecting the main entry and a circular tower connected to the walls are in clear view. Montecuccolo is a castle with fortified hamlet; the keep and the rampart walk were restored in the 1980s, in work which attracted criticism because of the use of modern materials such as glass on Medieval structures. Sestola has a sturdy fortress strategically sited above a sheer cliff, reached by a staircase, which offers an attractive view of the town. Near Sassuolo, Montegibbio castle belongs to a consortium of local authorities, who have opened its large park with beautiful old trees to the public. Rebuilt as a residence after the ravages of an earthquake in 1501 and centuries of war, it stands on a hilltop which has been fortified since the X Century at least. The castle at Montefiorino, in the Val Dragone, was originally constructed in the XIII Century by the Montecuccoli family; it has now been renovated as the Town Hall and also as the Museum of the Partisan Republic of Montefiorino. The ancient keep, with traces of a doorway on the second floor, still dominates the restored inner courtyard.

### **ITINERARIES OF THE RESISTANCE**

PHOTO REFERENCES:

**PHOTO N. 8 "MOUNTAIN S.GIULIA PARK"**

**PHOTO N. 9 "MONTEFIORINO CASTLE"**

### **Modena, gold medal city**

Modena was awarded a Gold Medal for its part in the Resistance, and there are discreet commemorations of the War years around the city. In piazza Grande, for example, two stone plaques on the wall of the Bishop's residence commemorate a massacre of Modena people and the shooting of three Partisan fighters, while a panel below the Ghirlandina tower contains the names and faces of the Modena people who died in the struggle for liberation. They are also recalled in the city's cemetery by a memorial chapel, where a sculpture by A. Pomodoro represents a wedge cutting into a globe, suggesting a world requiring change.

### **The Museum of the republic of Montefiorino**

The Partisans were extremely active in the Modena mountains, in the upper Secchia valley, and the area also saw the creation of the first Partisan Republic, at Montefiorino, which survived from 18 June to 30 July 1944. The small town's XII-XIII Century castle now houses a museum dedicated to this republic, which occupied an area of 1,200 km including the municipal areas of Montefiorino, Frassinoro, Polinago and Prignano in the province of Modena, and Ligonchio, Toano and Villaminuzzo in the contiguous Reggio Emilia hills. The museum tells the story of the Republic of Montefiorino through objects, photographs, films, written documents and video testimony by those who took part in the events described. A relief model and a number of diorama displays give a more concrete picture of the places where the Partisan drama unfolded. The chronological and thematic layout focuses on the military problems of the Partisan bands, the political and administrative affairs of the Republic and the

history of the Modena-Armando Partisan Division. It also illustrates the daily life of the Partisans, the role of women and the social groups from which Resistance fighters were drawn. The museum's effectiveness is further enhanced by its surroundings in the old castle, which is still completely intact, even though it now also serves as the town hall. The castle also played an important role in the life of the Republic, and is itself a link with the events described in the museum.

### **A park commemorates the Monchio massacre**

Monuments in the nearby villages of Monchio, Susano and Costrignano recall the massacre of the local population by the Hermann Goering Division on 18 March 1944.

The park/monument at Monchio is dramatic and attractive at the same time, since an uninformed passer-by would simply see lovely conifers in a tranquil setting similar to that of many other parks, complete with playground and park benches. The park takes on a different character when one knows that each tree commemorates one of the people killed in the massacre that 18 March, and unfortunately there are no less than 136 of them. The monument itself in the centre of the park consists of a column covered with bronze panels modelled in bas-relief showing scenes from the events of that tragic day.

### **The Monte S. Giulia park**

The Monte S. Giulia Park near to the centre of Monchio is dedicated to the Resistance. On the summit of the hill stands a small Romanesque church; its tower, destroyed by a German bombardment in 1944 has not been rebuilt, although the body of the church, also demolished, has been reconstructed. Trees typical of the zone have been planted all around it, and the park is dotted with benches, barbecues and huts where visitors can picnic. The symbolism of all this needs no explanation: an affirmation of life against the atrocities which took place here. A large open space at the entry to the park contains 14 sculptures arranged in a circle like large menhirs, creating a "sacred zone": this is the Santa Giulia Memorial (inaugurated in 1994). Here the Resistance is not commemorated in images, but recalled by using visual symbols to inspire thoughts of life, violence and peace.

## **ENJOYING AND LEARNING ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD**

### PHOTO REFERENCES:

PHOTO N. 1 "FESTA' FAUNA PARK"

PHOTO N. 2 "ROCCAMALATINA ROCKS PARK"

PHOTO N. 4 "BUCAMANTE WATERFALL"

PHOTO N. 11 "PATH IN THE WOOD"

PHOTO N. 13 "THE MOCOGNO'S PIANE"

PHOTO N. 14 "CHESTNUT WOOD IN MONTECRETO"

PHOTO N. 15 "FOLA BRIDGE"

### **The Giardino Esperia**

Another place where natural history and education are combined is the Giardino Esperia, established by the Modena section of the CAI (Italian Ramblers' Association) at Passo del Lupo, at the foot of Mount Cimone, 1500 metres above sea level. This garden of three hectares, with its adjoining park with benches, stone-paved paths and small bridges, contains a cafe, a beech wood, beds of alpine flowers (including edelweiss), many species of flowers found on the surrounding mountains, and herbs. Open from mid May to the end of September, the garden offers special attractions throughout the summer months, from the crocus in early May and the globe-flowers and gentians in the middle of the month to the orchids in mid June, the mountain thistles and saxifrages in mid August, the poisonous berries and delicious redcurrants and sorbus fruits in mid September, and the bilberries, strawberries and raspberries. Of course there are also times when no spectacular flowers are in full bloom, but visitors can console themselves by visiting the herbarium, a real garden within the garden, where well preserved flowers of various species are always on display. The most special feature of the Esperia is its practice of providing full details about every species present, including its scientific and common name, habitat, flowering time and pharmacological properties, as well as any interesting folk

traditions concerning it. Many plants and flowers are accompanied by signs carrying quotations from poems about them. A visitors' route with signs in braille for the visually impaired was established in 1989.

### **Natural parks and areas of special scientific interest**

The Parco naturale di Sasso Tignoso-Monte Cantiere-Piane di Mocogno occupies an area of 10,700 hectares on the spur which forms the watershed between the Secchia and Panaro rivers, and can be reached along the via Vandelli, the old route between Modena and Tuscany, now a bridle-way. It contains the remains of one of the most ancient Apennine forests, with evergreens alternating with beeches, shrubs and meadows. The main species of Apennine flowers are found here, including medicinal herbs.

As well as the flora and fauna of the zone, the Park is also intended to protect the historic remains it contains, such as the stone huts at Casoni, near S.Andrea Pelago, and the ancient examples of traditional mountain architecture at Cavergiumine. Geology enthusiasts will enjoy visiting i Cinghi, near Boccasuolo, with its abandoned Nineteenth Century mine workings.

The Selva di Monfestino-Bucamante , classified as a site of special scientific interest in 1976, occupies an area of about 1500 hectares above the Nuova Estense road a few kilometres above Torre Maina.

Pavullo, approached from the Nuova Estense road through a dense wood of firs, is of interest to the naturalist for two reasons. The first is the Parco del Palazzo Ducale, which contains trees of several species of note, including cedars (one truly gigantic), sequoias, yews and pines of various types. The Frignano Natural History Museum, also well worth a visit, contains many exhibits of the local flora and fauna, and also illustrates the geology and origins of the Frignano region. The Parco regionale dell'alto Appennino modenese was created in 1990 to protect an area of outstanding natural beauty of great importance for its flora and fauna. The new park covers an area of about 15,000 hectares of high mountain land near the towns of Fanano, Sestola, Montecreto, Riolunato, Pievepelago, Fiumalbo and Frassinoro.

Visitors' centres are planned at Fanano and Fiumalbo \*.

### **A landscape sculpted by the weather**

The Sassi di Rocca Malatina, easily accessible from the Passo Brasa road a few kilometres beyond Guiglia, stand out strikingly from the surrounding landscape. Over the millennia, the formations which used to cover these rocks have eroded away, revealing the underlying crags of yellowish sandstone. This has created the immense sculpture of the Sassi, which soar upwards 312 metres, from 298 to 610 metres above sea level; the top 74 metres of the tallest rock can easily be climbed in about ten minutes. Already so unusual in themselves, the Sassi are also home to the peregrine falcon, which nests in this rocky habitat. Because of its interest to naturalists, the 300 hectares around the Sassi have been protected through the creation of the Parco Regionale dei Sassi di Roccamalatina.

A short detour from the via Giardini, before Lama Mocogno, brings one to Prê Canina, between Monzone and Brandola. This is the site of a rock bridge 33 metres long, known as the Ponte Ercole .

This long monolith, given its curved shape by the water which has worn away the softer ground beneath, is so strange that locals call it the Devil's Bridge.

### **Percorso Sole and Marano Riverside Park**

Constructed between 1979 and 1984, the Percorso Sole is a pathway which runs alongside the Panaro river from the Vignola sports and swimming-pool centre to the Marano bridge. Suitable for walkers or cyclists, the path leads through a riverside landscape of willows, poplars and alders, and a wide range of shrubs including hawthorn and dogwood. In 1988 a further kilometre of land up river from the Marano bridge was added to the Percorso Sole as the Marano Riverside Park. Equipped for leisure activities, the park also contains a sculpture by I. Bortolotti and a small open-air amphitheatre.

### **Percorso Belvedere**

The Percorso Belvedere, a country trail in three sections, starts at Casona, a short distance up the Panaro valley from Marano. This well marked pathway is suitable for walkers, horse-riders or mountain-bikers. Since it takes 4.5, 5 or 6 hours to cover the whole distance, depending on the means of transport used, the trail is best travelled in sections to allow time for the return, as it can be reached by car at many points. The trail, which consists of unpaved roads, paths and some stretches of metalled road, is best enjoyed in spring or autumn and offers a variety of landscape, natural features and homesteads and hamlets. The dominant vegetation consist of hornbeam, oak and chestnut, depending on the height above sea level, while the undergrowth offers a wealth of shrubs and flowers. In the first section, the pathway follows the Rio Frascara, crossing and re-crossing the stream on a series of small bridges. At the first picnic area, there is access to a gully containing an attractive little waterfall. Two interesting features are just a few minutes apart: the first is the Romanesque pieve di Trebbio, (see "Romanesque architecture in the mountains") which is followed by the Sassi di Roccamalatina (see "A landscape sculpted by the weather") . As woodlands, chestnut groves and hamlets alternate, the path leads on to Castellino delle Formiche (a small hamlet nestling in a circle around its tower) and Samone (with its historic centre dominated by a rugged medieval fortress/house). Continuing along our route, we come to Monte della Cisterna and the Rifugio della Riva (777 metres above sea level) before descending to Monalbano (395 metres), the end of the first section. The second section of the path brings us to Montese (802 metres above sea level) and then leads on through chestnut groves, woodlands and stream crossings to two points of natural interest, the Orrido Canobi and the Orrido Gea, between Sasso Baldino and Montello. Medieval remains along the route include the ruins of the Monte Questiolo castle and the XII Century Rangoni Tower at Rosola. The 3rd section (the only part not completely marked) climbs towards Maserno and Monteforte (930 metres above sea level), with traces of a former castle and the XIV Century frescos of a small oratory. The final stretch ascends to the summit of Monte Belvedere (1138 metres) before dropping down to Castelluccio.

## **ALTERNATIVE APENNINE**

### PHOTO REFERENCES:

PHOTO N. 16 "DOCCIONE WATERFALL"

PHOTO N. 17 "THE PASS OF ARCANA CROSS"

PHOTO N. 19 "NOCTURNAL LANDSCAPE OF SESTOLA"

PHOTO N. 20 "NINFA LAKE"

PHOTO N. 21 "SANTO LAKE"

PHOTO N. 22 "BACCIO LAKE"

PHOTO N. 24 "MOUNTAIN CIMONE"

PHOTO N. 25 "SKIERS"

PHOTO N. 26 "LONG DISTANCE SKIING"

PHOTO N. 27 "ALPINE SKIING"

PHOTO N. 28 "CIMONE CABLE RAILWAY"

PHOTO N. 29 "SKI LIFTS"

PHOTO N. 30 "CHAIRLIFT IN THE MOUNTAINS"

PHOTO N. 31 "WITH MOUNTAIN BIKE"

PHOTO N. 32 "EXCURSIONISTS WITH MB"

PHOTO N. 33 "EXCURSIONISTS WITH HORSES"

PHOTO N. 34 "EXCURSIONISTS CLIMBING"

PHOTO N. 35 "EXCURSIONISTS AT THE TOP OF MOUNTAIN GIOVO"

PHOTO N. 36 "PARAGLIDING"

PHOTO N. 37 "FISHING IN THE RIVER"

PHOTO N. 38 "CANOING IN THE RIVER"

## **Beautiful places for lovers of tranquillity**

The Lago della Ninfa and Lago Santo are lakes of glacial origin with the typical shape of the Alpine lake, surrounded by dense coniferous woodland.

Lago della Ninfa, easily reached by car just off the road between Pian del Falco and Passo del Lupo, has an unusual history. It used to be lovely enough to deserve its name, which means "The Nymph's Lake", but its water level dropped to the point where it seemed it might even dry up altogether. The

authorities stepped in in the early '90s to dredge it and apply a layer of clay to improve water retention, and the situation seems to have improved. The lake is still very attractive from many angles, in winter or summer, but above all in the autumn, when the yellow of the larches contrasts with the green of the other conifers.

Lago Santo is the largest of the Apennine lakes. 500 metres long and 1500 metres in perimeter, its 58 thousand square metres of water lie below Monte Giovo, one of the peaks on the ridge which divides Emilia from Tuscany. It is also accessible by car and this, together with the beauty of its landscape, make this spot one of the favourite destinations for Modena's Sunday trippers during the summer months. However, Lago Santo is also well worth a visit at other times of year, when the absence of crowds allow its natural beauty to be appreciated to the full.

### **Striking walks through beautiful country**

An easy path leads from Lago Santo to Lago Baccio, 1554 metres above sea level. Lago Baccio has very little open water and is surrounded by marshland vegetation which bows in response to every passing breeze. Once seen, its calm setting in its open mountain valley is difficult to forget.

The walk to Lago Scaffaiolo from the Dardagna valley in the province of Bologna is quite short, but from the Modena side the alternatives are more varied. After driving up from Fanano to Ospitale and then Capanna Tassoni, where the metalled road gives way to an unpaved track, the visitor may leave his car and walk up to the Croce Arcana pass, or drive all the way to the top. From the pass, a path which more or less follows the contour line leads behind Monte Spigolino to the lake, which is unusual in that its water level remains fairly constant all year round, although no-one is sure where the water comes from; no streams lead into or out of it, and so it is probably fed by an underground spring, which however has never been identified. It is not very large (5 thousand square metres, 200 metres long, 80 metres wide, 2.50 metres deep) but the surrounding scenery is extremely impressive. At 1750 metres above sea level, instead of majestic woodlands Lago Scaffaiolo has to make do with mountain meadows, which offer little protection against the wind that often rises suddenly to chill a picnicker.

From the lake, the path marked 401 leads down a secondary ridge to Lago Pratignano, which lies amongst vast meadows and beech and fir woods. Ten times larger than Lago Scaffaiolo, and no less than 635 metres long, the lake is shallow and largely overgrown with marshland plants, which cover it with a mass of tiny flowers at flowering time (the most typical is spiked water-milfoil). The presence of marsh trefoil, and above all the carnivorous sundew, mean that this lake is also of great botanical interest.

### **Where water is power**

At Riolunato a dam across the Scoltenna river (which flows down from the mountains of the Regional Park, and later combines with the Leo to form the Panaro) creates the reservoir which, kilometres downstream, supplies the Strettara hydroelectric plant. It is fascinating to trace the path of the long enclosed channel which conveys the water along the side of a valley so narrow that it seems to have been cut into the rock, and over aqueducts, to the point where it starts its fall to the Strettara turbines. A bridge near to the hydroelectric plant is one of the oldest in the Frignano area, and used to be guarded by four stone lions until they were removed when work started on construction of the nearby tunnel for the new Estense road.

### **The Apennine ridge**

Many people look down on the Apennines as a poor relation to the Alps, but anyone familiar with these mountains knows that they have their own capacity to thrill. To discover this, one only has to walk the ridge path number 00, which leads from Passo delle Radici to Abetone, and on to Passo della Croce Arcana, at heights between 1500 and 2000 metres above sea level. The long line of peaks and rocky heights rising majestically above the tree-line and the slopes falling away on both sides, often very steeply, create an almost Alpine landscape very different from the gentle hills often associated with the Apennines. Anyone who does not suffer from vertigo will have little difficulty in walking the whole path, although a little experience and great caution are needed at Altaretto and

Grotta Rosa (walking towards Lago Baccio) on Monte Giovo, at Denti della Vecchia overlooking Val di Luce, and at Cima Tauffi, between Libro Aperto and Passo di Croce Arcana.

### **A vast choice of round circle walks**

Walks where one has to retrace one's steps can be boring, so the option of planning a round circle walk (with the aid of the footpath map published by the CAI, ) is an important plus factor. Below, we suggest just some of the many such routes possible in the high Apennines. Sestola, a mountain town well known as a tourist resort, is the ideal base for walks which do not require much time or mountaineering expertise, but reward anyone willing to expend a little energy on discovering new landscapes.

### **A walk around Monte Calvanella**

From Pian del Falco (above Sestola), one can follow the line of a disused ski-tow to the top of Monte Calvanella (1529 metres), which gives a view in all directions of the villages along the Via Giardini and the chain of mountains which divides Emilia from Tuscany. Path 449, which leads down from Monte Calvanella, runs parallel to the road to Passo del Lupo, joining it at Passo Serre. This is the starting point for path 443, which is wide for 10 minutes and then becomes narrower as it enters a vast pine wood with many juniper bushes in its undergrowth. Note the ancient retaining walls. With high meadows and rounded shapes on its North side, here to the South Monte Calvanella changes character, with many bare sedimentary rocks and wild gullies. Turning sharply to the right to avoid an old landslide, the path descends to fields and a metalled road, which in just a quarter of an hour leads to three farmhouses, their long sloping roofs still partly covered with the traditional local slate. The last of these (casa Poli) has a chapel with windows in XVII Century style and is dominated by a huge sycamore, perhaps the same age as the chapel itself. The road becomes unpaved and climbs steeply to rejoin the road from Sestola to Pian del Falco.

### **Amongst the marmots on Monte Cimone**

From Passo del Lupo, the ski centre above Sestola, a cable-car carries visitors to Pian Cavallaro (1861 metres). From here, the climb to the top of Monte Cimone (2165 metres) is not very hard. First, a well walked section of path 441 leads to Buca del Cimone (1966 metres). Then path 439 takes us to the junction with path 447, which brings us to the top in just a few minutes. The peak itself is marred by the Airforce Weather Observatory, but on particularly clear days the view from the Tyrrhenian Sea in the South West to the Alps in the North is breathtaking. Even in hazy conditions, the panorama stretches from the towns on the edge of the Po Valley to the Apuan Alps and right along the Apennine Ridge from the province of Bologna to that of Reggio Emilia. Path 485 leads down the other side of the mountain to path 449, which quickly returns to the chair-lift. At many points on this walk, one may catch glimpses of marmots, which live on Monte Cimone in large colonies. They are quite used to people, but the sentinel of each group still gives a piercing whistle of alarm at the approach of intruders, and this tells the walker that marmots are close at hand. They can often be picked out by the trained eye, although their coats offer excellent camouflage amongst the mountain rocks.

### **From the rocky crests above Passo del Lupo to the charcoal-burners' trails**

The names men have given to places often provide very apt descriptions, so anyone intending to walk from Passo del Lupo ("Wolf Pass" - 1550 metres) to Cresta del Gallo ("Cock's Crest") simply has to start off along the Colombaccio ski slope and then aim for a rock spur which really looks very much like a cockerel's crest. From here, path 449 leads to Salto della Capra ("Goat's Leap"), another rocky spur cleft by a wide crack.

Another few hundred metres along the airforce road bring the walker to Pian Cavallaro (1861 metres), a broad green valley where horses are turned loose to graze. Beyond the Alpicella (the ridge which forms the North West border of Pian Cavallaro), a path which is sometimes hard to find amongst the bilberries and meadow grass leads down to Sette Fontane, where there is still a cistern to collect the water from the "Seven Springs" which give the spot its name. We are now below the tree-line, so the

path, occasionally difficult to identify after earth-moving works, is now in the shade of a beech wood. This is the area where charcoal-burners used to work in the 1950s; the circular terraces noticeable beside the path, where black soil and a few fragments of charcoal can still be found, are all they have left behind. After emerging from the wood, the path leads back to Passo del Lupo, completing the circular walk.

Walking in the mountains above Fanano:

on Libro Aperto, a striking peak on the border of Tuscany and Emilia

After passing the Doccione waterfall, the Fellicarolo road from Fanano finally comes to an end at I Taburri, a plateau with two or three houses. The climb from here to Monte Libro Aperto (1936 metres) is tough, since the rise is of over 700 metres. Path 433 leads upward for an hour through a beech wood, which finishes on a bluff with a few scattered large beeches, their roots exposed and branches bowed by the wind, that marks the next stage on the climb. After Pizzo dei Sassi Bianchi ("White Stone Bluff"), which certainly deserves its name, the final upward pull to the peak starts, along a rocky path giving a view of a fine show of wild rhododendrons in late June. Monte Libro Aperto can be reached either by a path that climbs straight up to the lower of the two peaks which give it its unusual forked shape, or by another, less steep, which leads along the shoulder of the mountain. There is a choice of return routes, but we recommend the path (marked 00) that leads along the main ridge to Cima Tauffi. Here walkers can turn left down path 524, which descends along the grassy ridge of Cima Tauffi to Passo del Colombino, beyond low mountain pines. From there, path 445, wide and shady, drops back down to I Taburri.

### **"Lago Santo" and "Monte Giovo"**

It is only a short stroll from the car park to Lago Santo. One of the possible walks starting from this lake leads to Monte Giovo, which looks like a huge flat-topped wall towering above the lakeside. From below, it looks as if once at the top it will be easy going, but in the mountains perspective can play strange tricks. The climb up Monte Giovo starts with path 529, which leads to Passo della Boccaia and then to Colle Bruciata before joining path 00, leading straight to the summit. The path is not too steep and there is plenty of time to enjoy the surroundings; first the beeches standing in bilberries, then a glacial valley strewn with boulders and smooth slabs of stone. On clear days, there is a good view of the jagged outline of the Apuan Alps. A cross marks the summit of Monte Giovo, which is not a sharp peak but a kind of plateau which encourages the hiker to walk on, catching glimpses of Lago Santo and Lago Baccio as they gradually come into sight below. Shortly afterwards, the path is interrupted by the sheer drop of Grotta Rosa, a descent of just a few metres where walkers have to keep a tight grip on the steel cable provided for their safety and try not to think of the precipice below. We now discover that what looked like a compact wall from the lake is actually a collection of rocky peaks creating a succession of ascents and descents, often with sheer cliffs below. Soon the path becomes easier, and we reach the Passetto (a few hundred metres from the summit of Monte Rondinaio, which offers an excellent view), where 523 can be taken to return to Lago Santo, passing Lago Baccio on the way.

### **Monte Cimone: the region's largest skiing centre**

In the winter, access to the mountains is made difficult for walkers by deep snow. Of course, experts can use crampons and ice-axes or off-piste skis, but most snow-lovers prefer the less risky options of downhill or cross-country skiing. Modena's Apennines have a consolidated downhill ski tradition. The five points of access to the Monte Cimone slopes (Passo del Lupo, Lago della Ninfa, Cimoncino, Polle and Montecreto) are gateways to 50 km of pistes (20 of them served by snow cannon) connected in a "carousel" pattern, no less than 24 lift facilities of various kinds (the cable-car and four-seater chair-lift from Passo del Lupo to Pian Cavallaro at the foot of Monte Cimone, as well as 3 three-seater and 6 two-seater chair-lifts and 13 ski-tows), which can all be used with a single ski-pass. The Doccia, Fiumalbo pistes are on the other side of Monte Cimone, and downhill skiing is also available at Piane di Mocogno and Piandelagotti.

Cross-country skiing is a more recent introduction to the Modena Apennines, except for at Frassinoro, the home of one of the sport's great champions. All the same, the area now offers no less than 12 cross-country skiing centres, with trails of varying length and difficulty. There are three around Monte Cimone, at Le Polle (Riolunato), Lago della Ninfa (Sestola) and Cimoncino (Fanano), and a fourth in the nearby valley of Ospitale, around Capanna Tassoni. There are others at Frassinoro (Tonino Biondini), Piandelagotti (Bosco Reale), S. Anna Pelago (Piana dell'Acqua Chiara), Barigazzo (Ducale Vandelli), Lama Mocogno (Piane di Mocogno), Pavullo (Airfield), Serramazzone (La Fondaccia) and Montecreto (Cervarola).

### **Horse-riding, mountain-biking and para-gliding**

In the hills and lower mountains, all walking routes are equally suitable for mountain bikes and horses. The most old-fashioned means of transport, are now very much back in vogue, in response to the need for quiet and contact with the environment which has led those most aware of the relationship between man and nature to make an apparent return to the past - although there is really a large dose of re-invention involved. Today, the rediscovery of a slower means of transport is linked to a new mentality, which appreciates slowness because it allows us to observe the landscape and environmental features which speed forces us to ignore. Traditionally the status symbol of the wealthy, horses are now accessible to more and more people, and there has been a corresponding boom in tourism on horseback, aided by the growth in the number of farmhouses offering accommodation for riders and their steeds. The last few years has seen a rapid rise in the trend towards farmhouses offering hospitality, as farmers in remote areas have turned their out of the way locations to their advantage by providing walkers, riders or cyclists food and bed and breakfast. This benefits both sides; for the wayfarers the farms provide the same service as mountain refuges, and the farmers themselves protect and maintain the environment. On the other hand, farmers struggling for economic survival in marginal areas can supplement their incomes by selling tourists food, accommodation and local produce. There are riding centres right across the Apennines (at Serramazzone, Iddiano, Pavullo, Polinago, Sassostorno, Piandelagotti, Sant'Anna Pelago, Fiumalbo, Pievepelago, Sestola and Fanano) where beginners can obtain instruction and tourists on horseback can find accommodation for their mounts. All these villages lie on routes way-marked by the A.N.T.E. (Italian Horseback Tourism Association) which lead across the Modena Apennines, passing by refuges and farms where hospitality is available. Mountain biking is also extremely popular.

Bikes can be hired in most resorts of any size, and many visitors also bring their own two wheels with them. There are a wide range of possible itineraries, running along riverbanks and watercourses, through national parks (such as the Percorso Belvedere, which crosses the Parco dei Sassi di Roccamalatina), or along the paths way-marked by the C.A.I. (using red and white stripes with numbers in black) or the G.E.A. (the triangle identifying the main long-distance walks). A careful look at the C.A.I. walkers' maps and guides will soon reveal the routes which are not too risky or strenuous - some paths, particularly along the main mountain ridge, are best enjoyed on foot.

The increasing interest in hang-gliding and para-gliding has led to the establishment of a para-gliding school, based at Pian del Falco (Sestola), with Monte Calvanella as its main launch site.

### **MOUNTAIN'S GASTRONOMY**

PHOTO REFERENCES:

**PHOTO N. 5 "AT TABLE: THE CRESCENTINE"**

**PHOTO N. 7 "CHESTNUT HOLIDAY IN ZOCCA"**

### **Flour, the traditional staple**

Many traditional recipes were developed by poor people who had only the few basic ingredients produced in a closed agricultural economy that was self-sufficient by necessity. They have survived in the local tradition, and have now been rediscovered in numerous trattorias in the countryside and in the mountains, as part of the search for genuineness noticeable in eating habits since the 1960s. The flour-based recipes of the different areas of the province vary quite distinctly; in the richer areas of the plain, fat is used in the cooking method, while in the mountains where life was a hard struggle against

poverty, no fat is used. Gnocco fritto is made from flour, salt and water fried in lard from home-fattened pigs. The dough is rolled out into a sheet somewhat thicker than an egg pasta and then cut into small diamond shapes which are tossed into the boiling melted lard, where they swell and become crisp, ready for eating with any of the local charcuterie products, or grapes when in season. The equivalent in the hill and mountain areas is known as tigella or crescenta. The dough is very similar to that for gnocco fritto, but the cooking method could not be more different, as the small pieces of dough are crushed between two flat, clean stones or pottery moulds (often decorated with the typical rose or six-pointed star motif) which are then placed in the hot embers of a fire.

This original method has now been replaced by moulds consisting of two cast iron plates, each with cavities for six or more tigella muffins, which fit together and can be placed on the gas burner of a modern kitchen hob. Tigella muffins are usually cut in half and filled with sliced cured meats or with a special mixture of minced pork fat, rosemary, garlic and parmesan cheese. Polenta, or maize porridge, served with mushroom sauce, cheeses or a meat ragout, or cut into slices and fried to accompany other dishes, is another traditional food common in all areas of Modena's Apennines. Borlenghi are only found in a more limited area around the Panaro valley. They are a kind of thin pancake, flavoured with garlic and seasoned with parmesan cheese, produced by cooking a semi-liquid mixture of water and flour on a steel plate. One of the most distinctive mountain specialities is ciacci, made from chestnut flour. A very liquid mixture of flour and water is cooked on a steel plate to produce a thin disk which is filled with local ricotta cottage cheese and sugar and rolled. Castagnaccio is also made from chestnut flour; it is an oven-baked cake, flavoured with lemon rind and these days also with cocoa powder.